*Apiti School Staff Appraisal 2011.*

**Final Comments to the Board**

**From Brian Coles, Appraiser**

As your Principal Appraiser for 2011, I provided the Principal with an interim draft report in November, just prior to the ERO visit which assessed the Principal’s performance against the Professional Standards for Primary Principals and both teachers’ performance against the Registered Teachers’ Criteria.

If the staff agree, that draft can be forwarded to the Board.

It reports that both staff easily meet the criteria and in some areas are a leading school at a national level in their educational practice.

The report portrayed both teachers as innovative, always seeking to improve their practice so that student engagement, progress and achievement is as good as it can possibly be.

I am sure the ERO report will confirm that the school is well-served.

In this final section of the report I shall include comments on two areas:

1. Special features of practice that may not be appreciated or understood by all in the school community.

2. The learning the staff have achieved during 2011. This includes how well the strategic plan has been tackled, the effects of PD, effects of innovations made to teaching that were not anticipated early in the year and the staff approach to their own learning.

**Special features of practice that may not be appreciated or understood by all in the school community.**

I have read Mary’s summary of the concerns expressed by some parents of the school and the action plan to address these. It seems an irony that some of the features that are the subject of concern are widely admired in professional circles and would seem to have great advantages for student learning and communicating information to parents.

Having said that, it is clear that if parents feel concerns something must be done about it. The Best Evidence Synthesis for school leaders includes an interesting table that shows how important to learning are parents’ relationships with their child’s teacher (see Appendix 1). I am impressed with the speed and sense of the staff responses; the action plan, the target for next year to raise achievement by getting parents better informed and the personal approaches to parents who have concerns.

Some of the practices at Apiti that educational professionals admire are:

1. The real learning situations such as the bush remnant restoration, the hydroponics unit and the integrated units that weave all areas of the curriculum into a coherent learning opportunity that culminates in students showing their learning to the community in some way. The underlying philosophy here is to engage students so that they become so involved they forget they are learning. If you are busy achieving a worthwhile outcome, learning something necessary to achieve it is a small hurdle, rather than a chore. Learning is ‘just in time’ rather than ‘just in case’. Such experiences also provide fuel for reading and material and an audience for writing that are much more motivating than ‘we have to write a story’!

2. The reporting systems on-line and on paper provide more detailed and accurate information than almost any other school in the country. They may indeed provide more information than some families want, but there is an opportunity here for parents to greatly influence their child’s progress by taking an active interest and discussing the information, including their self-reflections, with their student.

3. The staff do engage in a lot of professional development opportunities which take them out-of-class for the day. This will be much less the case from 2012 as Government-funded PD will be much more targeted at schools whose achievement is low, definitely not the case at Apiti.

They do make very good use of these opportunities to improve their teaching programmes.

They also are asked to present aspects of practice to other teachers. This is a valuable learning opportunity for them because it requires them to think about and articulate a justification for their practice, to say why they think something works, not just that it does. It is also a professional responsibility.

**Staff Learning During 2011**

All schools are required by the NAGs to state targets for improvement in student achievement early in the year and report (an ‘analysis of variance report’) at years end.

The targets are set having considered the achievement of students across the school and the need to accelerate the progress of students whose rate of progress is seen as below their potential, or whose achievement is below a National Standard level in literacy or Mathematics.

As well as targets for improved achievement in literacy and numeracy schools may also set goals for improvement of some aspect of their practice that could contribute to improved learning across the curriculum. In 2011 staff aimed to convince students and parents about the value of authentic contexts for student learning and participated in a cluster that aimed at helping students learn how to learn more effectively, thus providing a means to accelerate their progress.

However schools are dynamic organisations. During the year students (and sometimes staff) may leave or enrol and this can immediately change the day-to-day priorities for the teacher. It may even render the targets set earlier irrelevant especially if the target is aimed at a student who leaves. In reality any student whose progress falters is targeted to try to accelerate their progress. For the staff of Apiti School, this is simply normal practice.

During the year other events occur that that change peoples relationships or make some opportunity available or unavailable. When a teacher tries a new teaching strategy no-one can predict what effects it will have. Obviously we expect improved learning, but what works for one student may not for another and teaching strategies, like medicines, often have unexpected side-affects.

Good leaders and teachers have to respond flexibly and creatively to these events and discoveries.

Therefore at years end we need to reflect not only on the pre-set goals or targets, but also on events during the year, how well we coped and what we learnt from the experience. What innovations worked well and with whom? What other effects did we observe?

Rather than go into a detailed account of the PD accessed or the learning that was intended in each case, I shall summarise what I think were the main lessons learnt, including some highlights that are regarded as nationally significant advances in practice.

1. Set less targets and make these general (e.g ‘improved achievement in place value’ or ‘accelerated learning for students X,Y and Z in reading’). If a goal is set to improve learning by involving parents more effectively, for example, plan how this will be tackled.

The staff have set much better targets and goals for 2012 using a simple format that should be able to be used to generate the BoT, MoE and appraisal reports.

2. Focus the PD more; less clusters and more focus on the school priorities.

The staff have reflected that some clusters were not as useful as others and recognised the priority of responding to parents’ concerns.

3. Incorporate the ‘targets’ requirement into our own school development processes. We have to own our own development, not waste time worrying about the MoE advice, which turned out to be very unhelpful.

4. The work done with Selina O’Leary in Maths led to significant improvements in assessment and records as well as teaching of problem-solving. The staff have been invited to present their work to other teachers.

5. Students produced excellent reflections on their learning that seem to offer a most effective way of learning how to learn. The staff presented some examples to the WAP cluster and to the NLC cluster.

6. An influx of new students with diverse learning needs into the junior room created a challenge any teacher would have found daunting. However setting up new routines, and attending to the needs of each student created a positive learning environment. We learnt that even an experienced teacher can use new ideas. Two under trial are mobilising the junior room to help induct new students and the Daily Five café. An effective strategy for one student was to focus on reading his own writing!

**Conclusion**

The staff tackled the targets and goals effectively, but there were too many of them and confusion arose about formats suggested by different advisors.

In spite of these difficulties they made excellent use of the best of the opportunities and that learning will benefit student learning in 2012.

In 2012 we should focus more on reflecting on what happened and what we learnt from it, than on reports directed solely by targets.